



# EBT WIRELESS PROJECT

## October 09 Newsletter



DHS

### From the Editor – Jan Walters

Total Transactions	EBT Transactions	Total Sales on Wireless
<b>2008 Total: 27,701</b>	<b>4257 (15.4% of total)</b>	<b>\$724,703</b>
<b>2009 Totals:</b>		
January 09 265	17 (6.4%)	\$14,678
February 291	42 (14.4%)	\$23,494
March 382	39 (10.2%)	\$26,075
April 579	44 (7.6%)	\$28,492
May 4134	448 (10.8%)	\$145,541
June 3897	715 (18.3%)	\$92,723
July 4299	1217 (28.3%)	\$74,445
August 5168	1541 (29.8%)	\$89,825
September 4934	1242 (25.2%)	\$103,249

#### September Facts:

- EBT sales for September 09 were \$12,747 compared to \$9,270 for Sept. 08. This is an increase of 37.5%
- EBT transactions for Sept 09 were 1242 compared to 924 in Sept. 08. This is an increase of 34.4%
- Overall, total sales for Sept. 09 were \$103,249, which is 6.7% higher than Sept. 08
- Total transactions of 4934 are 6.1% higher than Sept. 08
- The average transaction amount for Sept. 09 was \$20.93 compared to \$20.80 a year ago
- 35 farmers had more EBT sales and/or transactions than commercial sales/transactions

Year to date sales for 2009 are \$598,537 compared to \$481,494 from a year ago. This is an increase of 24.3%. **Year to date EBT sales are \$51,865 compared to \$33,457 from a year ago. This is an increase of 55%.**

In September 2009, there were 145,887 Food Assistance/EBT families in Iowa. \$40.8 million in benefits were issued in September to these families.

Here are other interesting facts regarding September sales:

There were 149 farmers/producers who were active during September. There were 107 who had EBT sales. The farmers who had 20 or more EBT transactions in September were:

- R & R Farms
- Westrum Produce
- Barb's Garden & Pantry
- Rinehart Family Farm
- Grubby's Kettle Korn

- Hoffman Produce
- DeMoss Pumpkin Farm
- Circle M
- Stillwater Greenhouse
- Scavo's Market
- Country Market
- Log Cabin
- Nostalgia Farms
- Storybook Orchard
- Circle W Produce
- Iowa Orchard
- Shutt's Garden Center
- Ven Horst Enterprises

**For the third consecutive month, congratulations to Tammy Donovan/Country Market for having the highest number of EBT transactions and the greatest amount of EBT sales. Country Market is located in the Sioux City area. Great job!**

## Interesting Facts

- After reading the August newsletter about a large EBT sale, a farmer from eastern Iowa called in with their story. They had a \$1,000 EBT sale for Angus beef. The customer indicated that the beef will last for the next year and that they can use future benefits for other food items. The woman was a regular shopper at farmers markets. She has four children. This particular farmer also advertises in the local paper and purposely states that he can accept EBT.
- Historically, August has been the highest month for EBT sales
- Historically, October has been the highest month for all sales

## Shutting Down for the Winter 2009/2010

The end of the market season is here for many of you. **This is the last reminder for closure letters. If you haven't done so, please mail us your seasonal closure forms.** We are closing approximately ninety accounts for the winter months. It will be extremely important to return the signed closure forms to us. **We must have a signed closure letter to mail to TMS to close down your account. If the closure form is not timely returned to us, you may not receive monthly reimbursement from DHS.**

We also ask that you pay close attention to our written instructions for returning equipment, battery, signs, etc if you dropping out of the program or returning rental equipment for the winter. We've had several instances where farmers have mailed state equipment to TMS rather than to DHS. We cannot recover the equipment in these cases. So, basically, a \$95 battery that DHS owns is gone! **Due to budget constraints, we will have to ask you to cover the cost of this equipment, if you failed to follow instructions in our letter.** If you have any questions before mailing or shipping equipment, contact Tracy or Jan first.

If you have any questions about closing your account for the winter, contact Tracy or Jan. Remember, if your situation changes, let us know so we can discuss it with you.

## New Instructions for Technical Assistance

DHS staff have assisted many of you over the past five years. As the Wireless Project has expanded and become a national model, DHS staff are fielding lots of questions and inquiries from other states, market managers and interested farmers. With staffing shortages and additional work on other projects, we needed to come up with an alternative solution to timely address your concerns and questions.

Tracy and Jan had a lengthy conversation with Kim Lyons of Merchant Source and Total Merchant Services (TMS) and have come up with the following solution:

- When you are experiencing an issue with your wireless machines, **the first step is to call TMS at 1-888-848-6825**. When prompted, you need to push 1. When prompted again, push 1 again to be connected with Tech Support. The first thing that you will need is your Merchant ID number. That number should be on the sticker on the side of your machine or on your billing statement. **If for some reason the person you are talking to you can't fix the problem, please ask to speak to Ray Rockwell**. Tracy has worked extensively for the past year with Ray and he knows our program very well and has worked hard to train the TMS tech support staff to better help Iowa farmers with any issue.
- If TMS does not help you fix the problem, then be sure to call Tracy or Jan right away.
- **If TMS tells you that your device needs to be replaced, call Tracy or Jan right away. There may be a replacement fee for the device. DHS wants the fee directly billed to us versus debited from your checking account.**

It is extremely important that you call TMS as soon as you realize that you are having a problem with your wireless machine. Your wireless machines need to be in working order at the Farmers Markets so that the Food Assistance population can purchase fresh, healthy food items from you.

## Farmer Survey is Coming in October

In mid to late-October, DHS will send you the annual survey form. It is very important to DHS to hear from you regarding your experience using wireless technology in 2009. We understand that many of you will still have markets and sales through December. As you do the survey, we want you to think of the traditional market season of May-October. There are several sections of the survey. This data is important as we prepare an annual report on the Wireless Project. We need to hear from you on what worked, what didn't work or what improvements could be made for next year. If you have any questions about the survey, please call Tracy or Jan.

If we have your email address, we will be sending you the survey via email. Otherwise, we will mail you a hard copy. You will be able to fax us the completed survey or mail it back to us. Thank you for your assistance and participation in the Iowa Wireless Project. You have made us into the premier program in the country.

## Rush Fees for Farmers Using First National of Omaha

We have a few farmers using Verifone VX 610 equipment that is processed by the First National Bank of Omaha (Lorrie Wacker is the contact person). First National charges a \$25 rush fee if they overnight equipment or supplies to the farmer. The other companies that we work with provide 'free' overnight services. **If you have a wireless device that has transactions processed by First National, DHS will not reimburse you for any 'rush' delivery fees.** If you need supplies, etc, contact Tracy or Jan first.

## Upcoming Events

**Farm Bureau Annual Conference** – Des Moines Convention Center December 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. More information coming.

**Des Moines Downtown Winter Season Markets** – Des Moines is holding their indoor/outdoor markets at Capital Square/Nollen Plaza; the same as previous years. The dates are November 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>, and Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup>. The Friday lunch market will be from 11AM-2PM. For more information contact: Kelly Foss (515-286-4928) or Molly Kotval (286-4911) if you're interested in selling at this market.

## Customer Survey Results for 2009

The customer survey response so far is phenomenal! **Just a reminder, please put the cards in the sack of any customer, especially those who use a plastic card for payment.** We've had many responses from customers who paid with cash. The comments are interesting, but we really want feedback from those who are using plastic (EBT, debit or credit). If you need more cards, contact Tracy. Here are the results so far:

- Why do you like to shop at farmers markets? (Top reasons in descending order)
  - Good/fresh food (112)
  - Fresh Produce (91)
  - Buy locally grown/made items (59)
  - Support local farmers (38)
  - It's Fun/relaxed atmosphere/music (19)
- How often do you shop at farmers markets?
  - Every week – 54%
  - Every 2 weeks – 13%
  - Once or twice a month – 10%
  - More than once a week – 9%
  - As much as I can – 3%
  - 3 out of 4 weeks – 3%
  - Not often - 3%
  - Other - 5%
- What markets do you shop at? (Top 5 responses thus far)
  - Davenport (Northpark & Freight House) – 71

- Iowa City - 41
  - Des Moines (Downtown, Drake, Valley Junction) - 32
  - Cedar Rapids – 21
  - Burlington - 15
- What did you buy today at the market? (Top 7 in descending order)
    - Fresh produce - 215
    - Baked goods – 139
    - Honey/Jam & jelly – 35
    - Flowers – 31
    - Vegetable plants/fruit trees/bushes - 30
    - Meat – 27
    - Eggs - 10
  - What would you like to buy but can't find at the market? (in descending order)
    - More Fruit – 10
    - Eggs - 8
    - More meat vendors - 4
    - Parsnips – 3
    - Sweet corn - 3
    - Cheese - 3
    - Lots of other things, such as (goat milk, fresh juice, shrimp, eggplant, arts & crafts, etc)
  - If a year round market was in your area, would you shop at it during the winter months?  
(Apparently, the question should have specified 'an indoor' year round market. Many customers are assuming that its outside and no produce will be available.)
    - Yes – 76.6%
    - No – 13.2%
    - No answer – 6.6%
    - Depends or already have indoor year-round market – 3.6%
  - What services could the market offer or provide that would make you shop there more often? (in descending order)
    - Restrooms - 58
    - Hand washing stations -47
    - Canning/freezing classes - 30
    - Chairs/sitting areas to relax & eat goodies – 7
    - Others (incl. shade, more variety, music, cooking demos, garbage cans, etc) - 22
  - How did you pay for your items today?
    - Cash –61%
    - Credit – 13%
    - Debit – 11%
    - EBT – 12%
    - Other (senior checks/checks) – 3%

Additional comments from customers:

- Davenport – Market is clean. Vendors are friendly. I can bring my puppy.
- Davenport Northpark – It was most interesting to talk to the man from Blackhawk College about their heritage tomatoes. I bought two and wish I had bought more.
- Sioux City EBT – I love Country Market. Fresh and good hours

- Iowa City - ☺
- Iowa City – This is a great market & seems to get better each year.
- Davenport EBT – Appreciate the help with fresh veggies. Thank you.

## Cost of Wireless Equipment

Just a reminder: If you lose the wireless device, there is a \$750 replacement cost. Total Merchant Services will deduct this amount from your checking account. If the device is stolen, be sure to contact your insurance agent to see if a claim can be filed. Insurance may pay for all or part of the replacement costs.

## Helpful Hints!

All address, phone number or bank account changes need to be reported as soon as possible. If you move or change phone numbers, we want the correct contact information to appear on the receipts from your wireless POS. TMS can help you perform a download so the correct information appears on the receipt.

If you change banks accounts, there is a \$20 fee that you will have to pay. TMS charges this fee, but it is crucial to have your sales deposited into the correct account.

## Important Information on Turning Off Your Machine!

If you decide to turn off your wireless machines, it is extremely important that you contact Tracy first, not Total Merchant Services (TMS). The EBT Wireless Program is a special program and therefore the closure forms **HAVE** to come through us. If you contact TMS directly, you may incur the \$295 early termination fee. We have had two farmers go directly to TMS and one of the farmers even sent the State of Iowa owned equipment back to TMS and it cannot be retrieved. The same farmer also threw away our signs. Because of these actions, the farmer has been billed for the loss State of Iowa equipment. If you have any questions on this issue, please contact Tracy.

## Reminders:

1. Since we have so many new farmers, remember that you cannot ring up a sale for another vendor. You could lose your Food Stamp certification and be terminated from the Wireless Project.
2. Since you are paying for the commercial transaction fees, be sure to keep track of what you are paying so you can use those expenses as a tax deduction.
3. You cannot set a minimum purchase amount. If an EBT household wishes to purchase \$.50 in onions, you do need to process the transaction. Same for any debit or credit transaction.
4. If your machine quits working, be sure to call Jan or Tracy right away! Or if need help during the weekend, you can call the 888 phone number on the side of your machine.
5. Let us know if you need any supplies such as paper rolls, power cords, or battery.

6. The second battery that we provide to you was purchased by DHS. If you ever need to return your wireless machine, be sure to keep one battery, carrying case and signs.
7. **Charge your batteries before market.** You should always have a charged battery, ready to go for market. If a battery is not holding a charge, contact Tracy for a replacement.
10. Please make sure to keep the original box that your machine came in as it contains the Sim card, which is needed to identify your machine if you have to call TMS.

## Help Desk

**We are here to help you!**

**When you have questions about:**

- **Participating in the Wireless project or reimbursement questions? Call Tracy Penick at 515-281-5545 or Jan Walters at 515-281-3588.**
- **What you can sell to EBT customers, or being authorized to accept EBT? Call FNS at 515-284-4035.**
- **Food Assistance eligibility? Call Char Hansen at 515-281-6820.**